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ABSTRACT

Descriptions of plants which serve as food and/or protection for birds of the southeast United States are presented in this publication. Explanations are given for each plant's ornamental value; time in bloom and in fruit; height; adaptations; and also the number of bird species that use it. Practical ideas are outlined for attracting birds to homes and gardens. These include suggestions related to water, screens and living fences, open areas, feeders, and winter protection. A model for creating a landscape design is offered and illustrated. A list of pamphlets on plants, soils, and conservation methods is also provided. (ML)

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Invite birds to your home

CONSERVATION PLANTINGS FOR THE SOUTHEAST

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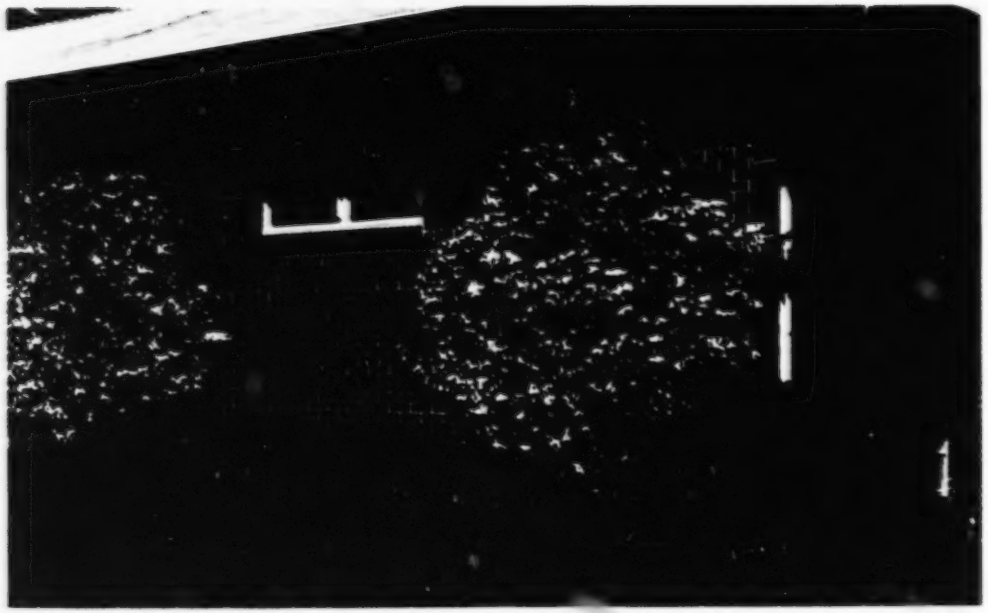
Invite birds to your home

By Olan W. Dillon, Jr., biologist, SCS

Do you enjoy having birds and other wildlife around your home? Many people do. We feel rewarded by the beauty, songs, and interesting activities of birds. And birds eat many insects and weed seeds we find irritating and undesirable.

If you would like to make your property more attractive to wildlife in a way that will also beautify and improve it, here are some conservation practices that have proved helpful to others.

Cover: Mockingbird family, courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Economic Resources



Meeting birds' needs

Here in the Southeast, we can see many kinds of birds in the course of a year. Thousands of birds pass through as migrants; others come to us from the Tropics to nest. Many that nest north of us winter in our area.

Wintering birds have somewhat different habitat needs than nesting birds. So a mixture of trees, shrubs, vines, and other plants can provide the variety of habitat needed for all seasons—places for birds to feed, sing, court, nest, rest, or hide. Even small yards can be made attractive to birds by the right choice of plantings.

Perhaps you have had experience in attracting birds with manmade feeders, baths, and birdhouses. The addition of properly placed natural attractors, such as trees, shrubs, and other plants, can attract even more birds. Using a conservation landscape plan for your property allows you to bring out the beauty you want as well as to provide the kinds of plantings that birds like.

Some of our most colorful fruits and berries are highly sought by birds. Shrubbery and hedges attractive to our eyes are also important cover or escape areas. Shade trees that beautify a yard also provide nesting sites. Sunflowers, corn, millets, and other annuals are interesting garden additions and provide food that birds eagerly take. We may find a small water pool desirable—so do birds.

Choosing plants attractive to birds

Birds like variety, both in sizes and kinds of plantings. To create varied habitat patterns, intermingle different sizes, shapes, and kinds of plants with open space. Variety in the plantings gives birds a choice of food—seeds, nuts, mast, fruits, berries, flower nectar, etc. Many birds catch the insects, worms, and spiders that are attracted to plants, especially when feeding their young.

Unfortunately many common shade trees and landscape shrubs are of little food value for birds. But pecans, crabapples, autumn-olive, Amur honeysuckle, nandina, pyracantha, fruiting mulberry, and red, willow, pin, and live oak produce good bird food. You can improve a yard that has only deciduous trees and shrubs by adding live oaks, junipers, cedars, or other evergreens that provide winter shelter.

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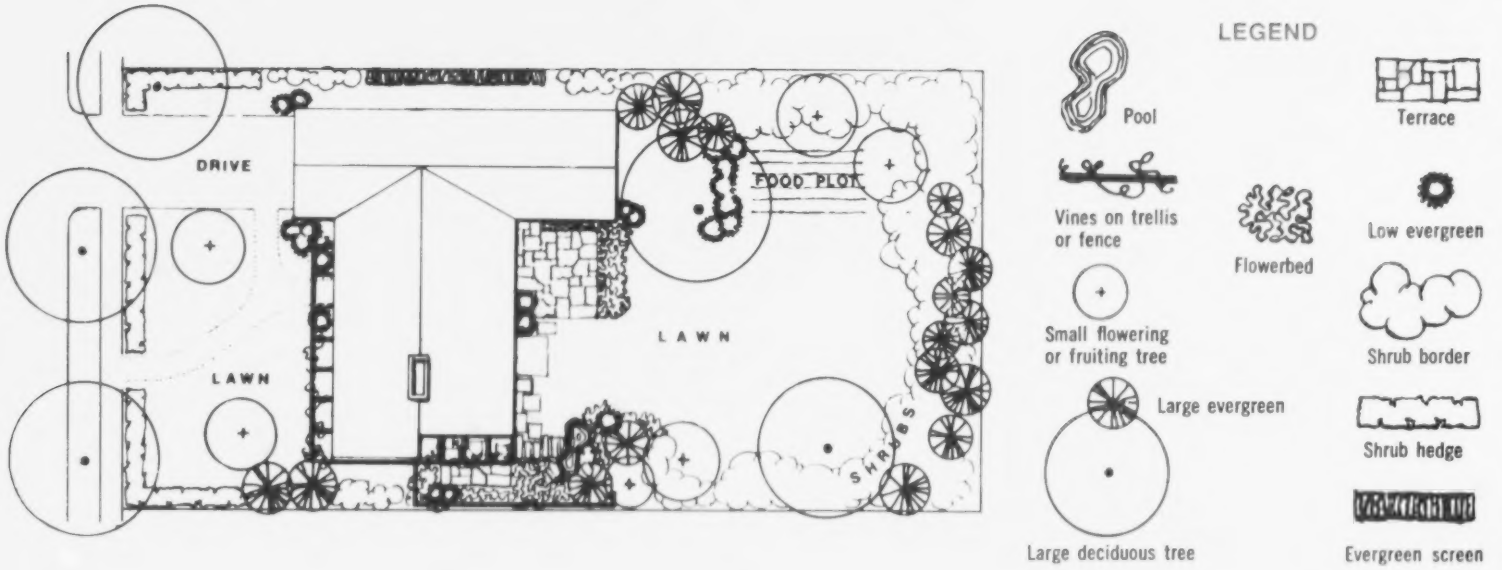

Creating a landscape design

There are many kinds and combinations of plants to consider in creating a conservation landscape design: hardwoods, conifers, vines, shrubs, grasses, flowers, and even weeds. In a small yard, you may be limited to single plantings of several species. With larger grounds, you can plan for hedges, clumps, food-plot rows, and massed plantings. Clearings within wooded areas are especially attractive to birds. This landscape design, by John Frey, Lexington, Mass., shows one way to vary plantings on a city or suburban lot of about one-third acre. The choice of species, arrangement, and placing on any area depends on the space available.

Landscape so that you can see the bird-attracting features from a convenient window, patio, or terrace. With careful planning, you can have a succession of flowers and fruits available through much of the year.

Plants for birds, beauty, and protection

Plants described here are adapted to appropriate habitats in the Southeast from the Carolinas to Florida and west to eastern Oklahoma and Texas. Plants illustrated are not to scale.

The table shows some of the plants preferred as sources of food by many of our Southeast birds. Groups of birds usually have similar plant food habits, although individual bird preferences and extent of use may vary.

Preference ratings for the plants were based on data from food-habit studies, but actual plant use by birds varies by season and situation.

Foods Preferred by Familiar Birds

PLANTS	BIRDS																
	Mourning and ground doves	Woodpeckers	Blue and scrub jays	Chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches	Mockingbirds	Catbirds and brown thrashers	Robins	Bluebirds and thrushes	Cedar waxwings	Orioles and tanagers	Cardinals	Painted and indigo buntings	Evening grosbeaks	Purple finches	Goldfinches and siskins	Rufous-sided towhees	Sparrows and juncos
Autumn-olive				u	◑	◑	◑	◑	◑		◑			○			○
Beautyberries					◑	◑	◑	○			○						
Cherries		◑	◑		◑	●	●	◑	●	◑	◑		●	●		○	
Crabapples		◑	○	u	◑	◑	◑		●	○	○		◑	◑		u	
Dogwoods		◑			◑	◑	●	●	◑	○	◑		●	○			○
Elderberries		◑	◑	u	◑	◑	◑	◑	◑	◑	◑	◑	○			◑	◑
Hawthorns		u	○		○	u	○		●								
Hollies	u	○	u		◑	◑	●	◑	◑		○					○	u
Honeysuckles		u			◑	◑	◑	◑	◑				◑	◑	○		u
Millets	◑	○	u	u							◑	◑	u	◑	◑	◑	●
Oaks		●	●	●	u	●							○		u	◑	u
Plums		○	○		◑	◑	◑			○	○					○	
Pokeberries	◑	○			●	◑	◑	◑	◑	◑	◑						○
Pyracantha		u	○		◑	◑	○	○	◑		○			○			○
Sumacs		○	○	○	◑	◑	●	◑	○	u	○		◑	○			○
Sunflowers	◑	○	◑	●							●	○	●	●	●	●	●

Insects around plantings attract vireos, warblers, flycatchers, martins, and swallows. Grasses and weeds attract many seedeating birds. Sugar-water feeders in conjunction with flowers can attract hummingbirds.

Other bird-attracting shrubs and trees that many nurseries stock are viburnums, privets, ornamental evergreens, elms, and European white birch. Virginia creepers, grapes, roses, blackberries, and blueberries attract many birds but require special gardening attention.

● Choice ◑ Good ○ Fair u Used, amount not determined

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Plants for birds, beauty, and protection

CRABAPPLE
***Malus* spp.**

Bird use: 24 species
Ornamental values: Many kinds; deciduous trees, 10-30 ft. tall; white to pink flowers; red, purple, orange, or yellow fruit vary in size
Adaptations: Wide range of well-drained soils; sun
In bloom: March-April
In fruit: September-March
Sources: Commercial nurseries, budding, grafting

SAWTOOTH OAK
Quercus acutissima

Bird use of all oaks: 37 species
Ornamental values: Rapidly growing, deciduous tree, 40–70 ft. tall; suited to fields, fence rows, and big yards; fall foliage brown to dark red; acorns resistant to insects and disease; nuts produced on 5- to 10-year-old trees
Adaptations: Well-drained soils; tolerates intermittent flooding in dormant season only
In bloom: March-May
In fruit: Fall, 40–80 lb. acorns per tree
Sources: Commercial nurseries, some state nurseries, acorns

SUMAC
***Rhus* spp.**
Staghorn sumac illus.

Bird use: 36 species
Ornamental values: Several kinds; deciduous shrubs, 3–12 ft. high; pale- to deep-green leaves, turning red in fall; greenish flowers in spikes; fruit clustered, deep red at maturity
Adaptations: Wide range of well-drained soils; sun
In bloom: April-May
In seed: September-February
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants, root cuttings

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PYRACANTHA (FIRETHORN)
***Pyracantha* spp.**

Bird use: 16 species
Ornamental values: Several kinds; evergreen shrubs, 6–12 ft. high; glossy green leaves; fragrant white flowers; striking red to orange fruit
Adaptations: Wide range of moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: March-April
In fruit: September-March (most frequent bird use in February-March)
Sources: Commercial nurseries

WILD PLUM
Prunus americana

Bird use: 16 species
Ornamental values: Deciduous shrub, 6–15 ft. high, to small tree, 20–30 ft.; suited to fields, fence rows, and big yards; spreads by suckers to form clumps; fragrant pink to white flowers; persistent red or yellow fruit
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun
In bloom: March-May
In fruit: June-August
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants

HAWTHORN
***Crataegus* spp.**

Bird use: 19 species
Ornamental values: Many kinds; deciduous trees, 10–30 ft. tall; pale-green leaves; abundant clustered, white flowers; persistent orange to red fruit
Adaptations: Deep, moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: April-May
In fruit: September-March
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants

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HOLLY
***Ilex* spp.**
Yaupon holly illus.

Bird use: 28 species
Ornamental values: Many kinds; mostly evergreen; upright rounded shrubs, 5–15 ft. high, to trees, 30-50 ft.; dark-green or variegated leaves, small whitish flowers; bright-red, orange, yellow, or black fruit (persistent)
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to shade
In bloom: March-May
In fruit: September-April
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants, cuttings

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ELDERBERRY
***Sambucus* spp.**

Bird use: 51 species
Ornamental values: Several kinds; deciduous shrubs, 5–10 ft. high; flat, whitish flower clusters; red to purple-black fruit
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: March-July
In fruit: July-December
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants

AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY
Callicarpa americana

Bird use: 12 species
Ornamental values: Deciduous shrub, 3–6 ft. high; inconspicuous bluish or pink flowers; bright purple fruit in rings around stem
Adaptations: Deep, moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: March-April
In fruit: August-January
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants, cuttings from 1-year-old wood

FLOWERING DOGWOOD
Cornus florida

Bird use of all dogwoods: 45 species
Ornamental values: Various forms: shrub 5–8 ft. high, to small tree, 10–40 ft.; deciduous leaves, red to bronze in fall; showy, white to pink bracts surrounding small, inconspicuous, bunched red fruit
Adaptations: Moist to well-drained soils; sun to shade (grows under larger trees)
In bloom: February (deep South) to late April (Carolinas)
In fruit: August
Sources: Commercial and state nurseries, wilding transplants, cuttings

SUNFLOWER
***Helianthus* spp.**

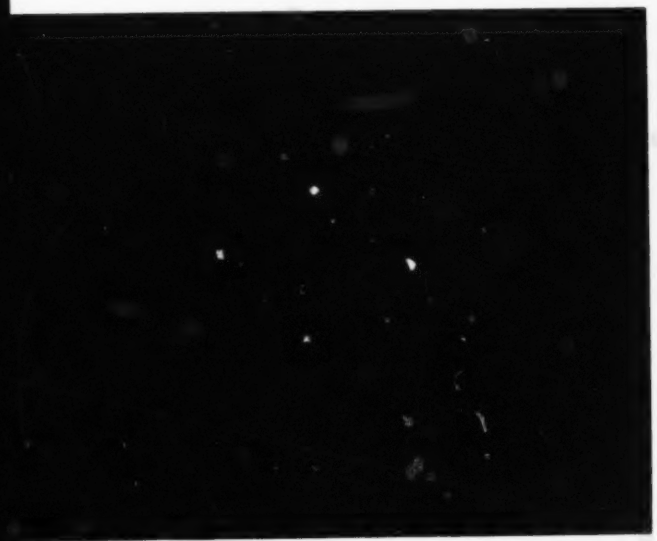
Bird use: 46 species
Ornamental values: Several kinds; annual or perennial plants, 4–8 ft. high; large, showy yellow flowers; size of seed-filled disks varies with species; needs careful placement for good landscaping
Adaptations: Wide range of soil conditions; sun
In bloom: May-August
Ripe seed: August-October
Sources: Commercial seed stores, harvested wild seed

NANDINA
Nandina domestica

Bird use: 12 species
Ornamental values: Shrub, 8–15 ft. high; dark-green leaves turning purple and scarlet in fall; leaves persist about 3 years; large, clustered flowers; prominent scarlet-red fruit
Adaptations: Wide range of moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: March-June
In fruit: October-February
Sources: Commercial nurseries

AMUR HONEYSUCKLE
Lonicera maackii

Bird use: 19 species
Ornamental values: Fast-growing, dense, deciduous shrub, 8–15 ft. high; persistent, leathery leaves; abundant small, white, fragrant flowers; red clustered fruit, raisinlike when dried, available all winter
Adaptations: Does best on deep, well-drained soils
In bloom: March-June
In fruit: September-October
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants



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AUTUMN-OLIVE
Elaeagnus umbellata

Bird use: 25 species
Ornamental values: Large, spreading deciduous shrub, 8–18 ft. high; gray-green leaves; abundant small, fragrant, yellow flowers; abundant scarlet fruit
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained, upland soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: March-April
In fruit: July-October (holds fruit into winter)
Sources: Commercial nurseries

COMMON FIG
Ficus carica

Bird use: 25 species
Ornamental values: Large shrub to small tree, 12–30 ft.; large, lobed, dark-green deciduous leaves; fleshy, edible, purplish "fruit" is a hollow receptacle housing minute flowers
Adaptations: Wide range of fertile soils; nematodes may be a problem on sandy soils
In bloom: May-June
In fruit: July-October
Sources: Commercial nurseries

DOVE PROSO MILLET
Panicum miliaceum

Bird use: 30 species; all millets: 60 species
Ornamental values: Fast-maturing, summer annual grass; seed can be harvested for winter bird feeding
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained fertile soils; sun
Planting dates: May-June
In seed: July-September
Sources: Commercial seed stores

CHERRY
***Prunus* spp.**

Bird use: 47 species
Ornamental values: Many kinds; deciduous shrubs, 5–15 ft. high, to trees, 20–75 ft.; small fine-toothed leaves; showy white flower clusters or drooping spikes; small bright-red to black fruit
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: March-April
In fruit: Variable with species, June-October
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants

MAYPOP PASSIONFLOWER
Passiflora incarnata

Bird use: 10 species
Ornamental values: Vine climbing with tendrils to 30 ft. long; unusual blue flower; resistant to pests
Adaptations: Wide range of fertile soils
In bloom: June-September
In fruit: September-December
Sources: Commercial nurseries, seed from wild plants

THORNY ELAEAGNUS
Elaeagnus pungens

Bird use: 9 species
Ornamental values: Robust, evergreen shrub, 6–11 ft. high; narrow leathery, green leaves silvery below; tiny, fragrant, silvery white flowers; light-red fruit speckled with silver
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained soils; sun to partial shade
In bloom: October-November
In fruit: March-April
Sources: Commercial nurseries

REDCEDAR
Juniperus virginiana

Bird use: 22 species
Ornamental values: Coniferous tree (many varieties), 10–50 ft. tall; dense, green to blue-green needles; small dusty-blue, berrylike, fleshy cones
Adaptations: Moderately well drained to well drained soils
In bloom: March-April
In fruit: September-December
Sources: Commercial nurseries, wilding transplants

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Bobwhites, right; far right, purple martins, cardinal, robins.

Ways of attracting birds

Water.—When water for birds is scarce, as it often is in residential areas, birdbaths help draw a variety of birds. A small pool with water dripping on a rock at the edge is especially attractive. Rocks or an old stump near the water are also attractive preening sites after bathing. On a large lot in the suburbs, a pond landscaped with conifers, clumps of shrubs, or a hedge is useful for those birds that need nesting and roosting areas and escape cover close to water.

Screens and Living Fences.—Rows of trees and shrubs can screen off an unpleasant view while giving privacy and lowering noise levels. They are also attractive to birds year after year. Live oak, conifers, autumn-olive, thorny elaeagnus, dogwood, redbud, or a combination of these make good screens.

Hedges or rows of Osage orange, trifoliate orange, pyracantha, dogwood, and honeysuckle (either bush or Japanese) can replace wire fences between areas, divide up fields, or protect a house area. Brown thrashers, cardinals, mockingbirds, and towhees find "living fences" ideal homes.

Open Areas.—Bobwhites, meadowlarks, and sparrows are some of the

birds seen around open lawns and fields with few trees or shrubs. Native grasses help landscape open areas that are not mowed. Such plants protect the soil as well as produce food and cover for these birds.

Feeders.—On a city or suburban lot, it is difficult to produce natural food that will last all winter. Supplemental feeding can help fill the gaps. Seedeaters, such as sparrows, cardinals, grosbeaks, finches, and buntings, will eat almost any kind of bird seed. You can use cracked corn, millet, and sunflower seeds, or you can buy bags of commercial bird seed. Fruiteaters, such as mockingbirds, catbirds, robins, jays, and orioles, like raisins and chopped fruit, especially apples. Suet is favored by woodpeckers, chickadees, and nuthatches, among others. This high-energy bird food is especially desired in cold weather because it helps the birds resist chilling.

Seed can be spread on a tray or put in a box feeder that protects it from the weather. Fruiteaters prefer a flat surface such as a tray. Suet is best put into a wire or plastic holder. Rendered suet can be stuffed into holes drilled in a tree trunk or limb or into a piece of board attached to a tree. The board should have a rough surface or be covered with wire so the birds can hold on while feeding.

Winter Protection.—Windbreaks and clumps of such plants as forsythia, cedar, junipers (particularly Pfitzer), spruce, pines, thorny elaeagnus, and Amur honeysuckle provide shelter and food during periods of severe weather. Although ice and snow storms in the South are of short duration, the difference between survival or death may depend on plantings that provide both food and cover.

The basic resources . . . soil and water

You should consider soil, slope, drainage, and exposure when landscaping for birds and beautifying your home. Houses, sidewalks, driveways, and streets increase runoff, and often the natural water flow pattern is changed. Careful landscape planning can handle the extra water and help check soil erosion. Planting on the contour adds to the natural beauty and helps in controlling erosion and water runoff.

Trees, shrubs, and other woody plants used for landscaping grow best on well-drained, fairly fertile, loamy soils not particularly suited to flower beds and vegetable gardens. Soils should be at least 18 inches deep. In the South, a neutral soil is best for most plantings.

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Harmonizing with manmade structures

A good landscape plan blends plantings with your house, walks, rock walls, and driveways. Place permanent plants where they will not interfere with foundations, sewers, or septic tank absorption fields. Use a variety of species, including annuals, to fill in along walls.

For assistance

You can get further information on plants, soils, and conservation methods from the Soil Conservation Service. Inquire at the office of your local soil and water conservation district. As part of its assistance to conservation districts, SCS helps people apply many conservation practices that increase wildlife. County agents, commercial nurserymen, landscape architects, and bird societies can also help.

U.S. Department of Agriculture pamphlets that may be helpful are:

- Autumn-Olive for Wildlife and Other Conservation Uses (L-458)
- Making Land Produce Useful Wildlife (FB-2035)
- More Wildlife Through Soil and Water Conservation (AIB-175)
- Soil Conservation at Home (AIB-244)
- Wild Ducks on Farmland in the South (FB-2218)
- Windbreaks for Conservation(AIB-339)

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